THE COMING OF LUCIFER

A DREAM OF "PROGRESS"

By

X

THE BOSWELL
PRINTING AND PUBLISHING CO., LTD.
10 ESSEX STREET, LONDON, W.C.2

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THE COMING OF LUCIFER

At sunrise in the land of Ing great Lucifer was born,
While grinning demons dipped to greet the high auspicious morn,
And ushered down the strong young soul, from Limbo safe set free,
To start and order, in the flesh, the evil days to be.

* * *

Ing, you may guess, was England once, but most enlightened nations
After the war began to scrap their "die-hard designations."
This was the brand-new "commonwealth," fresh named and up-to-dated,
Some orators and literary gents had just created.

* * *

And now it really seemed high time some prophet came to birth,
To match a fitting Heaven to a reconstructed earth.

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The old theology was dead, so Mister Bliffin said
(The little man who wrote those books so many people read),
They told you all you need to learn for quite a modest sum,
" God's Universe or Mine " and " Man, Past, Present, and to Come,"
They showed how life and all began, how life and all must end,
As Bliffin somehow seemed to know and things appeared to tend.

* * *

Viewing the pigmies of the past, the giants of to-day,
They showed how art and mind have marched upon an upward way,
How Bliffin grew from Socrates by evolution's law,
And Shakespeare's immature conceipts are perfected in Pshaw.

With churches and with creeds it dealt in quite
a startling way,
For none of them were worth a rap, so Bliffin
seemed to say,
In fact of man's religious faith as "mass
hallucination"
He furnished quite a brief but most exhaustive
explanation,
Since superstition first arose mid anthropoid
arborians
Till Christianity collapsed and died with the
Victorians.

* * *

But since for such exploded myths he kept a
kind of pity,
He showed how Providence might still survive
as a Committee—
A sort of self-determined, representative
affair,
Composed of highbrows live and dead, with
Bliffin in the chair.

But though this creed might seem to meet all
rational aspirations,
It scarce seemed fitted yet to oust the older
revelations;
So at this crucial time the world was well
prepared to hear
Some clear celestial message from some live
authentic seer.

* * *

His life's inception shadowed forth the fell
design in view,
His birth and breeding suited well the work
he had to do;
His earthly parents loved and lived from stale
conventions freed,
And preached and practised day by day the
pure "progressive" creed.
Both were divorced, yet loth to wed, for each
was wont to say,
"Some more congenial 'comrade' still may
chance to come my way."

One day the she-progressive squirmed and shouted, " Oh, my hat ! "
Then to her mate laughed loud and long : " It seems there'll be a brat.
Of course I wanted no such thing, this one or any other,
And read with care your birthday gift, ' How not to be a Mother.'

* * *

"But since the accident's occurred, perchance this precious son
(I guess 'twill be a boy) may prove the long-expected one,
The hope and promise of the world, predestined soon to show
This eager questing age the way it really ought to go."

* * *

Now, just about this very time it chanced that freakish fate
With rank and fortune both endowed her communistic mate.

An uncle, rich and ripe, of noble name though
not descent,
Catching a chill, was summoned hence, and,
much protesting, went.
So "Comrade" Binks, altho' he swore 'twas
much against his will,
Became a millionaire, and eke Lord Brokerage
de Bill.

* * *

"My uncle's wealth was fairly won, it had no
feudal taint;
His peerage, generously earned, excited no
complaint.
No tyrant of the soil was he, but massed his
modest pile
Besting his fellow-men by frank finesse and
honest guile.

* * *

"So in our fervent 'land campaign' we have
no cause to slack,
'Tis other people's land on which we wish 'the
people' back;

As to our own, 'twere envy past all reasonable
bounds
To grudge us Premium Villa with its ornamental grounds.

* * *

"But now, old thing, reviewing all these new
considerations,
Think you 'tis time to readjust our marital
relations?"

* * *

"To be a Peeress? Pouf!" she cried, "that
cuts no ice with me;
Yet some absurd prestige still clings to dames
of high degree,
Some silly social stigma still condemns unwedded bliss:
We two had better couple up—it really comes
to this.
And since to social-climbing snobs it pays our
cause to pander,
A titled goose shall now attend a titled propagander."

So in some free and funny church, with morals
up to date,
They found a pastor quite prepared to bless
their happy state.
They heard his genial sermon once, 'twas
broad as broad could be,
And seemed to meet their views so well they
asked him round to tea.

* * *

" Divorced, and live in sin? Tut, tut! well,
well! I'll fix you fast—
But understand this little lapse must really be
the last.
That marriage laws should be relaxed claims
fair consideration,
But still, my little flock must do these things
in moderation."

And so the rites were said, and so was born
this child of grace,
A little earlier, it's true than's usually the case.
And now the kindly padre cried, "My church's
right I claim,
This precious pledge of hallowed love to
consecrate and name."

* * *

The mother cried, "If you insist, baptised the
kid shall be,
So bless and sprinkle as you will, but pray
don't sprinkle me.
We mean to call him Lucifer, bright word of
hopeful omen,
Despite the prejudicial cant that clings to that
cognomen,
And we'll take it as a favour if, in compliment
to you,
Your honoured name of Pifflejaw you'll kindly
give him too."

And so the fateful child, thus bred, thus named, for good or bad,
Was launched upon his life and grew a likely little lad.
And much his parents pondered ere his boyhood reached maturity,
How best to train this pioneer of perfected futurity;
With Mr. —— himself discussed the best scholastic plan,
While Mr. —— a moment spared from re-creating man.

* * *

" Which Public School ? " " Why, none at all "—they both appeared annoyed—
" To teach him ' loyalties ' quite effete, and ' values ' vain and void,
Old manners and old morals based on obsolete tradition,
And traces he might never lose of Christian superstition."

They named a noted school instead on novel
lines conducted,
Where all the best progressive youth could
fitly be instructed,
Where boys and girls were trained alike to fit
the future polity,
With certain wise adjustments made to hasten
sex equality.

* * *

The pupils all were neatly clad in skirts and
Eton jackets,
And all the boys did crochet work and all the
girls played racquets;
With epicene insouciance they mixed in work
and play,
And "man is woman, woman man," their
teachers made them say.

For Dr. Coué bade them hope that, should they persevere,
All outward differences in time would surely disappear,
The virile virtues cease to deck the tame perfected new man,
Gentleness, modesty, and grace be laughed away from woman;
Till man at last be man no more, discarding masculinity,
And feminists achieve their aim by stamping out feminity.

* * *

"There send your boy, unless meantime the timorous old foundations
Should have the pluck to put in force the newer sex-relations;
Wycombe and Winchester revise their view-point fixed and narrow,
Rodean set up a house for boys, and girls be sent to Harrow.

"No patriotic cant he'll learn, no monarchist
appeals,
No militarist talk to taint his pacifist ideals, ugh!
No puritan restraints shall curb his ego's free
volition,
No stale religiosity impose its inhibition.

* * *

"Some bright sophisticated maid his chosen
pal shall be,
No reticence or shame shall cloak their converse
frank and free,
Glad to exchange their fresh young minds
(made prematurely wise)
On every topic, once tabooed, disdaining all
disguise."

There in due course young Binks was sent, and
won such approbation,
His parents viewed his future course with glad
anticipation,
Till something happened at the school I'd
rather not discuss,
Stirring what stout progressives called " a quite
unneeded fuss."
To hostile prejudice, be sure, it gave a welcome
handle,
And caused what old-world prigs and moral
die-hards called " a scandal."

* * *

And all because some fresh young souls precociously made good
Some of the pioneer ideas for which their elders
stood,
And, crossing t's and dotting i's with innocent
intention,
Moved just a little in advance of ethical convention.

After a decent interval, his reputation cleared,
At Camford University young Hopeful next
appeared.

* * *

He scorned the set scholastic quest for " knowledge not worth knowing,"
Yet shunned alike such vain pursuits as sport
or games or rowing,
His intimates were such as scoffed at all life's
common rules,
Called " highbrows " by the vulgar herd,
" aesthetes " or " b——y fools,"
Tradition's dilettante foes, rebellion's mild
uprousers,
With thoughts dishevelled as their hair, discursive as their trousers.

Just what they meant you never knew, or
what they would be at,
Though like Chesterton and water flowed their
stream of silly chat.
"The only certain thing in life is what it
hasn't got,
And nothing really is except the something that
is not."

* * *

All codes of conduct they condemned as
cramping limitations,
Since to fulfil their precious selves embraced
all obligations.
And Lucifer, who inly laughed like any Philistine,
Yet shrewdly sensed in all this trash some
kindred thing malign.

But soon that fateful chance occurred, since
now the time was rife
Which first revealed him to himself, transforming all his life.

* * *

He met a psychic friend one day who asked him
to a sitting,
To meet some disembodied souls from somewhere earthward flitting.
Opening up an introduction to a most intriguing
set,
Who proffered an adventure that he hadn't
sampled yet.

* * *

Their shining light, or chief control, a kind of
spectral crony
Through whom the human medium worked,
was called old man Benoni.
He dwelt in Sidon long ago and practised as a
seer,
But practised now in Camford, or in Limbo
somewhere near.

Despite his high celestial rank, he was a gamesome sprite,
To toss the household goods about was ever his delight:
He turned the tables, twirled the chairs, or gave your hair a twist,
And dealt you playful punches with his ectoplastic fist.

* * *

From what he told of life beyond, it seemed a pleasant state,
With pastimes suitable for all, from saint to reprobate.
Leaving to each aspiring soul whose earthly course was run,
None of the fetters of the flesh, but nearly all the fun.

In God's revolving scheme of things the new
is ever old,
Each fresh conceipt some half-forgotten tale
already told.
So forward went this last advance on orthodox
theology,
Back to the witch of Endor and her primitive
necrology.

* * *

No vulgar dupes were those who now raked up
these ancient rites
Whereby mankind essayed long since to scale
forbidden heights,
But physicists of good repute and thinkers of
renown
Tried hopefully to lift us up by dragging spirits
down.

And disabused Materialists, amazed somehow
to find
That matter more and more eludes the scientific
mind,
That something still transcends the final atom
when you've caught him,
And Bishop Berkeley wasn't quite the fool old
Johnson thought him.

* * *

To find there really was a soul upset these
worthies sore—
A thing most men and women and all children
knew before—
And made them disregard with scorn the
Church's sapient ruling
That banned for reasons good and sound this
necromantic fooling.

Now, when young Binks, with careless mien,
approached the psychic sphere,
A wild commotion seized the sprites who
thronged from far and near,
A blast came howling through the room, the
raps came loud and faster,
Voicing some sinister acclaim that hailed him
Lord and Master.

* * *

Benoni, looming through the dark, crawled up
and bowed the knee,
As to some high and kingly sprite of paramount degree.
And he, scarce knowing what he said in this
revealing hour,
Began to gibber in response with words of evil
power.

This broke the circle for the night, and proved
its final ending,
For all got wondering where they were, and
whither things were tending,
And, to sum the situation up, began to ponder
well,
If their easy quest of Heaven hadn't landed
them in ——.

* * *

But Binks henceforth, aware of whence and
wherefore he was sent,
Got more and more to know himself and what
his mission meant,
Practised, in secret, magic gifts which servient
spirits gave him,
And nursed his plan to ruin man, ostensibly to
save him.

But when the hour drew nigh to make his
fateful revelation
A baffling langour clogged his soul, a crippling
hesitation.
All down the ages, through his flesh, a warning
message came,
And softly through the heavenly spheres some
angel breathed the same.

* * *
* * *

There is a sweet shire nestling in the west
Where England still is England at her best,
With dark wild woods and lonely haunted
downs,
And dreaming pastures green and old quiet
towns,
Serenely rustical, that make their pride
To match, not mar, the circling countryside,
And where the land shelves snugly to the sea,
With peaceful clash they mingle and agree ;
On no fierce rocks no boastful billows roar,
And storms break gently on the yielding shore.

Here in a placid Grange cawed round by rooks,
Left to himself, to nature, and to books,
Where, seeing naught, he had a vague impression
That phantoms of the past kept quiet possession,
That rustling dames and courtly fops and fogies,
Disdained and bade begone his blatant bogies,
The prophet, in a mild and chastened mood,
Sojourned one summer for his sad soul's good.
Tired of life's turmoil, sick and soured was he,
Doubtful of all he was, or was to be,
And longed to brood oblivious in his cell,
Till some renewed incentive broke the spell.

On green lawns prone, he lounged alone, or
strolled by mossy ways
Fringed with dark yew, where loomed in view
some flower be-sprinkled maze.
And on his sleep, so calm and deep, the moon
shed magic rays,
Till o'er the hills with gladdening thrills there
dawned enchanted days.

* * *

At times in meditative strain he paced a silent
strand,
Save by one hidden path he knew, secluded
from the land,
Where intimate eternal seas, on lonely beaches
breaking,
Sounded some secret to his soul, transcendent
thoughts awaking.

* * *

One lustrous morn some impulse strong and
strange
Stirred him betimes, to meet some fateful
change
To carry on awake, it so did seem,
The wondrous course of some unfinished dream.

He rose half dazed, then dressed and crept
downstairs,
To breathe with zest the pure and early airs,
With not a ghost of doubt where he must be—
Swiftly at sunrise by the shimmering sea.

* * *

There he stood still, till at some nearing sound,
Like footsteps on the sand, he turned him
round;
Then with one glance, half rapture and half
awe,
Oh! what a vision was it that he saw,
His heart's ideal in living features drawn,
His unknown dream embodied at the dawn.

Eve's very type and Holy Mary's too,
Fit soul-mate for some Christian Knight to woo,
Lovely and wholesome, sane and sweet she stood,
A woman, unashamed of womanhood.
Sure of herself, ignoring every plan
To sink her sex and start burlesquing man,
But walked her own appointed ways aright,
Softness her strength, and modesty her might.

He bowed and passed her by, but from that hour
His spirit owned this maid's supernal power.
Stirred by her speech, so simple yet so wise,
Thrilled by each glance from those entreating eyes,
Old loyalties and old reverences rose,
Sublimely wakened from their long repose,
And by this earthly angel called him back
To set his feet on some cerulean track.
But not the one (of this he had no doubt)
On which the world just then was setting out.

* * *

And so upon that self-same shore full soon there came a day
When, walking wildly to and fro, he forced himself to say,

"By all the Spirits of the Pit, by all the Powers of Hell,
By all I am, and am to be, this love I cannot quell.
By God, if He will hear my prayer, and this one boon is given,
Her hand shall lead me where she will, even if it leads to Heaven."

* * *

With cloudy wrack the sky grew black, a wailing wind was heard,
The lightning flashed, the thunder crashed, the slumbering ocean stirred,
His guardian demon shrieked aloud and hovered round his track,
The sea-birds scattered far and wide, and never more came back.

* * *

When all grew clear, as in a flash, his dazzled gaze espied
A nymph, but not the one he sought, all smiling at his side.

He knew full sure this siren's lure (she'd
 singed his wings before,
And he, poor fool, had vowed to risk her ravishments no more).
For though she scorned each charm and grace
 that make for woman's worth,
In form and face was Aphrodite's self come
 back to earth.

* * *

"You shan't be hers! I tell you straight, I
 want you for myself.
I'm rich, and freely you shall spend my dower
 of paltry pelf,
You've got ideas and so have I, we'll work them
 out together,
We'll mount this mad careering world and ride
 it hell for leather.
That chaste Madonna, let her go; I know those
 virgin saints
In tiresome reticences wrapped and hindering
 restraints.

Wife or no wife! take me at once, I'm yours
from A to Z,
Nor need to wait till by some priest some
mumbo-jumbo's said,
'Tis sex impels, and nature calls, and neither
need appal.
While as for shame! oh! that be d——d!
we women now know all.
I've said my say—tis you to play." Hot kisses
closed her lips,
And Circe's victim then and there had fairly
burned his ships.

* * *

'Twas after this, his nascent fame grown big
throughout the land,
He laughed to find about his path a fast-increasing band
Of cranks and faddists, long-haired men and
crop-haired women, all
Acclaiming with consentient voice their prophet's sacred call.

His blatant mistress bored him stiff, and gladly
he'd have shed her,
But wanting money for the cause, he deemed it
best to wed her;
And there were others came and went, his
" partners by the way,"
His " soul-companions," " spirit-brides," who
seldom said him nay.
But these were secret ties of love, from vulgar
fame concealed,
Until the new " conceipt of sex " was ripe to be
revealed.

* * *

In all he did, in all he taught, he kept this aim
in sight:
To get the deeds of darkness done, disguised
as works of light.
He spread his poison, slow and sure, through
many a specious sect,
And made the evil seem the good, bamboozling
God's elect.

The cult of Mammon thrived anew, as quite a Christian creed,
And " social service " formed the mask for envy, hate, and greed.
Till with the Sermon on the Mount he made it quite agree
To help the poor to rob the rich and curse their charity.
He set the pacifists to work, and got the Church abetting,
" I came to bring a sword, not peace," conveniently forgetting ;
The Strong man armed must arm no more, since strife should not occur,
" Not righteous self-defence ? Nay ! peace ! oh, peace ! " cried Lucifer.
'Twas " backward Christian soldiers " now, and "throw your arms away,"
Fools die, but wise men live, though not to fight another day.

In every sphere of life and thought he let the
notion gender
That worth and merit now consist in cowardice
and surrender,
Till all who cherished fixed beliefs and held
them with decision
Were dubbed as "Die-hards," not in praise, but
frankly in derision.

* * *

Yet all the time he prompted those who stirred
up civic strife,
With death to all who dared to doubt some
crazed new scheme of life,
And got this doctrine kept alive with bomb and
gun and sabre,
"'Tis wrong to kill your country's foes, but
right to kill your neighbour."
And tongue in cheek, he kept, through all, this
purpose sly and steady,
That while the powers of good disarmed, the
hosts of hell stood ready.

Art, with a great big A, obeyed his sinister obsession;
No one, he taught, should dare to daunt its adequate expression.
Each genuine æsthetic urge must have unbridled play,
And art for art's sake seek and find its own uncharted way.

* * *

He saw how art regarded thus, immune to good or evil,
Conveniently might come to mean just art to serve the devil,
And soon its craftsmen, one and all, while vaunting versatility,
Got harping on one nauseous note, with ominous docility.

* * *

And when they claimed to treat of life in every phase or kind,
'Twas ten to one you guessed at once which phase they had in mind;

A daring book was one that dared be everything but clean,
And literary licence meant the right to be obscene.

* * *

And soon amongst artistic folk a cognate notion spread,
That put them on the downward path he wished mankind to tread.
In execution, as in aim, they flouted all convention,
And, making anarchy the mode, they helped his fell intention,
By ridiculing stale technique and damning trite formality,
They subtly made subversive art serve decadent morality.

* * *

Each latest post-impressionist his pioneers outran,
Till all fell back in style and scope to mimic tribal man.

Crude daubs that cavemen would have scorned,
yet fools conspired to praise,
Rude verse less rhythmic, more uncouth,
than pristine bardic lays.

* * *

Chipped chunks of marble or of stone that got
the public guessing
Set forth the neo-plastic school and earned the
critic's blessing;
While the very newest music could be reproduced at need
Just by banging on a tom-tom or by tootling
on a reed.

* * *

But perhaps the most enlightening of these
cultural advances
Was the pleasing evolution of the fashionable
dances,
On from the stately minuet and courtly gay
gavotte
To the graceful "possum wriggle" and the
chaste "gorilla trot."

Dignity, reverence, self-restraint, and all the high emotions,
'Twas Lucifer who made them rank as antiquated notions.
He cast his eye around the "Press" and shrewdly singled out
Some zany from whose pen flowed ink like water from a spout,
Then in his ass's ears, pricked up to catch each parrot-cry,
Whispered the word "Victorian," and stood complacent by.

* * *

It flew around, till, one and all repeating it with zest,
The silly shibboleth was made a standard and a test,
For everything thus dated back, no matter what its worth,
Was marked, henceforth, with one consent, for mockery and mirth.

Each sterner merit, once extolled, and each
endearing grace,
They complimented with a grin and praised
with a grimace;
They dubbed right conduct dowdy, called good
manners quaint antiques,
And all the virtues of the past just resurrected
freaks;
Made modesty a mincing minx grotesque in
garb and gait,
And chastity a comic frump absurdly out of
date.

* * *

And clear through this decisive cant the master-
thought persisted,
That change is always for the best and must not
be resisted,
That progress means just moving on, no matter
whence or where,
And so the faster you progress, the sooner you
get—there.

" E'en pessimists admit," they said, " and
preachers of reaction,
That man's material advance gives cause for
satisfaction.
Since year by year and more and more, with
gadgets and devices,
Life grows mechanically equipped " (" agreed :
if that suffices ;
And of this bright millennial trend, here's one
proof out of many,
That Bliffin owns two motor-cars while Plato
hadn't any.")

* * *

Now, this Victorian stunt so took by storm the
public mind,
That Lucifer resolved to try some others of the
kind,
And mobilised the class he dubbed in secret
ridicule
" The fool intelligentsia " as his most convenient
tool.

These highbrows talked—Lord! how they
talked!—and spouted ink in oceans,
With scarce a hint of truth or sense in all their
windy notions;
They never paused for serious thought in either
great or small things,
But learned by rote a casual crammed-up
ignorance of all things.
And since the world in which they moved was
not of facts, but phrases,
You needed but some verbal trick to tickle
them to blazes.

* * *

To cant of "cults" and "complexes" proclaimed you in the know;
You called a lie "veridical" and made it sure
to go;
You voiced a "novel viewpoint" and you
got them all agog;
You talked of "values" reassessed, and
scrapped the Decalogue.

You indicated " angles " and you emphasised
"appeals,"
And all the blithering brotherhood came
bleating at your heels ;
You named a " Pact " to banish war, and got
them all applauding,
Then brought your army up to strength and
built a fleet according.

* * *

If you shouted out a " slogan," they chortled
with delight ;
If you called a thing " tendencious," it was
certain to be right ;
Or trotting out the master word that never
failed to tell,
You hailed them with a " gesture," and they'd
follow you to hell.

* * *

In all this gush they quite ignored two virtues
plump and plain
Our fathers doggedly upheld, our sons might
learn again :

The homely knack of holding back when
mischief leads the way,
The simple pluck of shouting " no ! ", when
fools are yelping " yea."

XX

* * *

To all the cures by quacks prescribed to heal an
ailing nation
These dupes gave free or forced assent, but
never blunt negation.
'Twas, " modern life will have it so," and " better
try it out,"
And " things appear to shape that way," and
" only Die-hards doubt."

* * *

So on they went with bland content, till, on some
vexing day,
When failure stared them in the face, they looked
the other way.
So may you guide a heedless world, regardless
where it goes,
So may you lead a donkey with a carrot at its
nose.

With all this crazed " mentality," no wonder that you saw
Some very queer developments in equity and law.
And here the prophet took a hand and played an easy rôle,
Inciting two conflicting fads that sought to get control.

* * *

For serious crime there came to grow a mild commiseration,
And even the worst offender earned a tender condonation.

* * *

" The murderer kills because he must, 'tis impulse moves his hands ;
For what he does amiss, blame not his conduct, but his glands ;
Of punishment pray speak no more nor hint of retribution,
What's needed here is treatment in some kindly institution.

" That theft is kleptomania all the wise have long suspected,
And burglary is just adventurous ardour misdirected;
The bigamist is one who gives free play to natural forces,
And if you bar two wives at once, get on with quick divorces.

* * *

" Fraud may be unrequited love, so Dr. F——d surmises,
And forgery may yet be cured by Swedish exercises;
Arson's an atavistic urge, made dangerous by repression,
Embezzlement, some psycho-mathematical obsession;
While many common crimes suggest infective germination,
And all may haply yield in time to prompt inoculation."

But though the pains and penalties of crime grew thus abated,
A vast and complex code of new offences got created,
And every act of social life, of work or recreation,
Passed under government control or local regulation.

* * *

If, wanting to complete your job, you failed to watch the clock
And passed the statutory time, you found yourself in dock;
For betting after breakfast policeman ran you in,
And to smoke without a licence became a deadly sin,
And to cut your hair on Tuesday, or to whistle in the park,
Drink milk without a bun, or eat a chocolate after dark.

" Caught in the act!" Although, for all his guilty, hangdog look,
That handcuffed rogue they're hustling off scarce strikes you as a crook,
Yet to some evil course it seems incurably addicted—
" An old offender," so they say, " thrice previously convicted."

* * *

You ask a constable his crime: he says, " To be exact,
It's section four of clause fourteen ' the Path and Pavement Act '—
Walking beyond the legal pace, with reckless oversight,
He passed that witness on the left, it should have been the right;
Hurried, and absent-minded, and in fact he quite forgot,
But that won't help him with the beak, he's safe to get it hot."

And so 'twixt right and wrong men's wits got
thoroughly bemused,
With conscience and legality conflicting and
confused;
And citizens, both good and bad, were in the
end persuaded
That law and order were a farce, just meant to
be evaded.

* * *

With this result, I need not say, our prophet
was delighted,
It being just the frame of mind his prompting
had invited,
And led the world by easy steps, this line of
thought pursuing,
To the universal anarchy designed for its
undoing.

But though the people fretted sore, and called the law a " hass,"
The highbrows tried persuading them to love it in the mass,
Get a social satisfaction from each bureaucratic measure,
And through personal discomfort gain co-operative pleasure.

* * *

For human pleasure, all agreed, was life's one end and aim,
The only practical ideal (yet each must have the same).
And the function of a ruler really finishes and starts
In dealing out enjoyment in exactly equal parts.

And since merit's grown invidious and success
    an usurpation,
Each must carry on contented his appointed
    avocation.
Thrift and diligence as selfish predilections
    now regarded,
And toil itself an evil that may some day be
    discarded.
Till 'work for all' means 'work for none,' with
    pay for young and old,
And life one grand collective loaf, officially
    controlled.

* * *

Now, what on earth (or somewhere else) comes
    here to intervene,
This tiresome visionary trash that seems to blur
    the scene,
This ghostly pomp of futile men and things
    that once have been
Passing across my gaze like mystic movies on
    the screen?

The past is dead and done, but though no doubt
it counts for naught,
I can't forget that someone once conceived this
silly thought,
" The present dies as soon as born, we guess
the future set
Long since in some celestial plan, but scarce
a glimpse we get.
The past alone is firm and fixed, and lives
immutably,
The only part we really know of God's Eternity."

* * *

Be that as may, it seems to-day I'm interrupted
here
To watch these pale persistences inaptly
reappear.

And far adown the vanished years, at first I
have to look,
While once again young David takes his pebble
from the brook,
Brave innocence, untaught to fear the childish
notion vain,
That simply thus, if you have faith, are grim
Goliaths slain.

* * *

Why do these Spartan dead loom up from lost
Thermopylæ,
Smiling triumphant in defeat for every coward
to see?
And when will reckless Curtius cease to leap
into his pit,
Determined thus to do, or rather more than
do, his bit?

Here sits a King, it looks like Alfred laying
down his laws,
Or listening while some liegeman pleads some
long-forgotten cause;
Here sits such virtue, valour, wisdom, majesty
innate,
That though he ruled so mean a realm, we call
him still "the Great."

* * *

I see the sun-glint of the East on English
armour shine,
'Tis Richard Lion-hearted takes the field in
Palestine,
A kindred host across the years comes clashing
in to meet him
As Allenby's victorious squadrons gallop up
to greet him,

See More step blithely to the block, and Ridley
to the stake,
With faith and doctrine poles apart, at one for
conscience' sake;
And not with all the world and all its glory
might you try
To tempt them for one hour of life they could
not justify.

* * *

Montrose is moving to his doom, the rebel
rabble roar,
Stilled by one grave majestic glance, sinks
shamed for evermore,
Owning of all that wrought and fought at that
tempestuous tide,
No kingly soul more nobly lived or more
supremely died.

Some unknown Knight fares forth to try some
desperate derring-do,
You know the end full well, and guess that all
the time he knew;
Not hope but honour heartens him, and what
sustains him best
Is the aim and the adventure, and the splendour
of the quest.

* * *

Here's Wallace—Hereward the Wake—the
Holy Maid—and Tell,
Egged on by narrow impulses we moderns
learn to quell,
Each heading what we now should call a
patriotic faction
Provokingly prepared to do or die for an abstraction.

But look! our Nelson breathes again his last
victorious sigh,
His work well done, his fame well won, and
all his cares put by,
Of all the loved and glorious things on which
his soul was bent,
Life held so much, yet death held more, and
beckoned him content.

* * *

The Iron Duke sits at his gate, from riding
through the town,
A murderous mob is on his track, he stares
them up and down
With stern and steadfast gaze, and then, dismounting full in view,
Says merely this, " Odd day to choose "—the
day of Waterloo.

Heroic Gordon stands serene, yet conscious
of his doom,
To watch his life's last sunrise gild the ramparts of Khartoum;
And who would barter smug success and drab
prosperity
For bright immortal failures such as this, by
such as he?

* * *

And now I have to wait and watch across the
picture wend
A vast procession of the dead that seems to
have no end;
I ponder still on what it meant—that mournful,
muffled cry,
"Was it for this?—was it for this you sent us
forth to die?"

* * *

But here the prophet's voice broke in, "That
most unhappy war
That never hadn't ought to be, and mustn't
any more,

Of King and Country, faith and truth, and such-like sad appeals,
Let the dead prate; they leave us cold with our revised ideals."

* * *

And now with gusto I resume the interrupted tale
How Lucifer contrived to make his secret will prevail.

* * *

The politicians, truth to tell, he largely left alone,
Since every noxious thing he preached they practised on their own.
The people's rule "of by and for" you'll judge with what sincerity
These gentry had proclaimed long since a self-sufficient verity,
Which came to mean in sober fact, although this sounded odd,
"The voice of folly is and shall be called the Voice of God."

But when they stressed the people's will, the people's this and that,
Infallibly you always guessed the game that they were at;
And should the people turn them down by some perverse majority,
They said at once the hostile vote possessed no real authority.

* * *

In one respect, I must admit, had public life grown cleaner,
No candidate now dared assume the old corrupt demeanour;
To bribe the voter was a crime, unless—and this seemed funny—
You offered frankly, not your own, but other people's money.

Taxation as the "Commons' gift," a kind of willing toll,
Was like sour apples in the mouths that clamoured for a dole;
So give them this refreshing fruit, far richer, rarer, riper,
That only those shall call the tune who cannot pay the piper.

* * *

Ninepence for fourpence! glorious words! oh, eloquence sublime!
What nobler call has stirred the soul in all recorded time?
Ninepence for fourpence! Burke and Pitt in vain had dared to vie
In all their most exalted flights with this uplifting cry.

But when this clarion appeal had won its due acclaim,
They found they had to carry on with others much the same;
For a legislative bonus (it's a most distressing fact)
Has no electoral value once it's turned into an act.

* * *

In reaping base ingratitude they faced the common lot,
And thanks for favours still to come were all the thanks they got.
So, mindful of the Latin tag, "Bis dat qui cito dat,"
They conjured forth new promises like rabbits from a hat;
And each one, struggling for the lead along these generous courses,
Competed who could squander most of taxable resources.

Their power thus won, these super-men with plausible intentions
Embarked on super-politics of grandiose dimensions,
With super-minds, no longer cramped by patriotic fictions,
They planned a super-state to fit their super-predilections,
To all the international cranks resigned decisive sway,
Broke Britain up, and flung her world-wide heritage away.

* * *

Freed from all base Imperial ties and retrograde alliances,
The sundered Realm was free to form cosmopolite affiances,
Though Wales became autonomised and Scotland separated,
With Whereonearthisthatvia got intimately mated,

With Tooral-looral-ural-land found new preoccupations,
And other nice impromptu States met at the League of Nations;
And to show her bona-fides, and to leave no lingering doubt
That the motto "Think imperially" was really down and out,
Gave international status to the commonwealth of Malta,
And with Balko-Bukovitchia shared a mandate for Gibraltar.

* * *

A hidden hint it surely was, sent by our arch-deceiver,
That wrecked our solid national house for Castles in Geneva;
And 'twas he that looked on laughing while our governmental asses
Chased false and flickering ideals through doctrinaire morasses;

IIv

And instead of sitting tight at home to manage
our affairs,
With other self-determined folk left free to
manage theirs,
On these polyglot excursions must perpetually
skidaddle,
With Dr. Whatisnamski and Professor Fiddle-
Faddle,
Who to build a world-dominion still fatuously
tried,
Without the aid of arms, and half the world
well armed outside.

* * *

Now, when these super-statesmen from such
super-occupations
Had leisure to attend to more domestic avoca-
tions,
Whichever party held the reins grew conscious
every day
Of a harassing discovery that filled them with
dismay.

In their programme of destruction, they were
fearful that of late
They had used the Constitution up at far too
quick a rate;
And as food for abolition, it was clear beyond
a doubt
That our ancient ordered polity showed signs
of giving out.

* * *

Since with the men of '32 the sage Macaulay
stood,
Looked on the world the Whigs had made,
and saw that it was good,
Their scheme of chartered freedom grew successively improved,
To a legalised mobocracy with every check
removed. Vv

But, spite of all, there came at last the fatalistic notion
To crown the work of ruin by one last subversive motion.

* * *

It had long been sadly pondered by the saner folk in Ing
That a politician's honour is the undiscovered thing;
That from skill in turning phrases comes a skill in turning coats,
And that what he calls his principles are baits for catching votes;

* * *

That a violent innovator of the most destructive school
Will let things be for quite a while, if once you let him rule;
And this maxim proved its verity in many a fateful hour,
" If you want a revolution, put the Tories into power."

"Pledged to oppose, and bound by every promise to resist it?"
Well! here I stress a vital point in case you may have missed it.
They said of each successive change, however they might rue it,
"It will never do to wait and let the other fellows do it."

* * *

And this reminds me of a craze that now possessed the nation,
Foreshadowed to our prophet in his early education,
Which the politicians touched upon most gingerly at first,
All careful to commit themselves no further than they durst.

Since Adam dwelt in Paradise and Eve abode
beside him,
The right of man to rule the roost had never been
denied him;
Though this important saving clause had always
rested true,
That Eve (not always with success) might tell
him what to do.

* * *

When Christian marriage supervened, the veriest
fool could see
That in a parliament of two there's no majority;
And the common-sense solution, preached by
Peter and by Paul,
That one must rule and one obey, was ratified
by all.

So man in council and in war maintained his sovereign say,
While woman in her own domain held undisputed sway;
No slogan sought as yet to make two opposites the same,
Or alter fundamental facts of function or of frame.

* * *

I love to tell how, answering once a shrill interrogation,
A rarely honest candidate once summed the situation:
" Equal rights for equal sexes, is that clearly understood ? "
" Yes, Madam, and I claim at once the right of motherhood."

So this epicene excursion seemed at first a brainless fad,
Looked at askance and ridiculed by Tory and by Rad,
A thing to make experience gasp and nature stare and wonder,
For if God made men and women, who can now correct the blunder?

* * *

They could and would, the hopeful cranks who pioneered the movement,
And on the Providential plan proposed a quick improvement,
Relying on the moral funk that marked this flabby age,
When no one dared oppose a thing that claimed to be the rage.

Effeminate man was always held a thing to
scorn and hate,
A mannish woman hitherto a sex degenerate;
But now in conduct and costume they dragged
her forth with glee,
A pitiful burlesque of all she wasn't meant to
be.

* * *

With " Daily Screech " and " Daily Scream "
in friendly emulation,
How most effectively to boom the latest Press
sensation,
The poor deluded souls were cruelly pictured
to the eye,
Perversely doing all the things they didn't
ought to try.

'Twas " woman " this and " woman " that,
to drive you to distraction,
And " woman " featured day by day in every
pose and action;
All grace and modesty tabooed, you had to look
instead,
At " woman " kicking up her legs and standing
on her head.

* * *

You even saw her following the tame pursuits
of yore,
So long as " woman " in some form was always
to the fore,
Thus " woman-horse wins Oaks " announced
one feminist with pride,
Another, going one better, had " smart wedding,
woman-bride."

And every girl was taught at school to scorn
her true vocation,
And try to compass, well or ill, some manly
occupation;
Though all within their secret souls harked
primitively back,
And, true to nature, every Jill still hankered for
a Jack.

* * *

But this result seems destined, that if Jill's to
be a worker,
Jack, as of old in tribal days, will tend to be a
shirker,
For every job a woman took, a man was on the
dole,
One idler more, one man the less to fill a
husband's rôle.

Though here and there the idle man as might
have been expected,
Despairing, took to woman's work which she
herself neglected,
Till a kind of compensation through the crazy
business ran,
When the office-girl was balanced by the house-
and parlour-man.

* * *

That women's votes left women cold at first
was widely known,
What men might think about it, most were too
polite to own;
Till in the public's heedless ears the thing
began to hum,
Accepted gradually by all as something "bound
to come."

The early martyrs of the cause seemed taking
futile pains
When they bit and scratched policemen and
tied themselves with chains;
But they reached the point where folly ends,
persuasive force begins,
When they chased the sacred persons of the very
mandarins.

* * *

This vixen violence may have stirred that sage
but sharp reflection
Which wobbling politicians need to vary their
direction;
Be that as may, in course of time they took
the fateful turn,
With a manifest advantage which they hastened
to discern.

Their hold upon the people's heart, they feared, was growing thin,
But here they felt a hope of fresh successes still to win
(Like fishermen who cast their baits in unexploited waters)
If they tried their tarradiddles on the people's wives and daughters.

* * *

So all combined or vied, ere long, the crazy work to crown,
And in a frantic year or two turned nature upside-down,
Scrapped all experience and ignored man's whole recorded past,
Instinct and common sense still feebly struggling to the last,
Reconstituting what was once a sane and virile nation
Once and for all upon a (shortened) petticoat foundation.

Now, all who've seen historic parties part with their convictions,
And shed their fundamental creeds as inconvenient fictions,
May guess which one, with secret shame and angry shy grimaces,
Flaunted the flappers' franchise in their dazed opponents' faces.

* * *

But when the prophet heard the news, he said, "I cry you best,
You've made 'dameocracy' a farce, 'miss-government' a jest;
And to legislative gamblers left one card alone unplayed,
To pass the children's franchise and out-vote the nursery-maid.

" But can't you see, you something fools ! you've
carried things too far ?
No breed of men will stand for this, if haply
men they are.
Give guidance to the girls ? why, this the girls
themselves will ban,
And fretfully await the rule of sane regenerate
man."

* * *

And there were other stunts which he himself
had never planned,
In which his eager instruments were getting
out of hand.

* * *

" These frantic pioneers, I find, are spoiling
all my fun ;
In much they do, I find my work is half already
done ;
But more than that, I seem to have a vague
uneasy notion
That there's something worse than that in this
accelerated motion.

"The world is going to hell too fast! the pace
must really slack,
Lest, made suspicious of its fate, it still might
scuttle back;
And the wiser way to treat mankind just now
perhaps is this,
To lead it blindfold on, by gentle steps, to the
abyss."

* * *

Well! so much for politicians, now you've
clearly seen and heard 'em
Involve themselves at last in this reductio ad
absurdum;
And listen while I tell you how the prophet
sought to shatter
Life's holiest foundations in a much more
serious matter.

As a guiling theologian he had now to make
a name,
Since to preach a false religion was the cause
for which he came,
With a flabby-dabby deism to oust dogmatic
piety,
And a comfortable creed of the most tolerant
variety.

* * *

" There is a God, but such a trump ! He knows
your limitations,
And smiles indulgently on all your little
aberrations ;
Of course He wants you to be good, but this is
surely clear,
That He who made you what you are will not
be too severe.

"So as to doom and punishment, whate'er the bigots say,
Be sure that all will certainly 'come right upon the day';
For if on earth you don't behave exactly as you ought,
Well! at the worst you'll come before some mild celestial court,
Where a judge of lenient bias and of democratic bent
Would never dream of d——g you without your own consent.

* * *

"'Twixt good and evil now, it seems, there rests no further quarrel,
And if there were they musn't fight, since war's declared immoral,
But will form a coalition in that rising young psychocracy,
That's tending fast in Heaven to replace the old autocracy."

To scrap the old religion for good tidings such
as these
Would prove a task as easy, so he hoped, as
shelling peas,
But was fretted from the first by a disturbing
intuition,
That a troublesome impediment still barred
their recognition.

* * *

He soon in fact perceived, in spite of all that
Bliffin said,
That the creed he sought to supersede was not
completely dead;
Nor could he stifle this surmise, however he
might try,
" What if, eternally derived, it lacks the power
to die?"

The gods of old had faded out, so far as gods
they were,
But what if this intrusive faith had sources far
elsewhere,
Celestial power on earth that strayed, no earthly
gear to gain,
Immortal Essence, mortal made, for sacrifice
and pain?

* * *

Chafed by vexatious thoughts like this, in black,
resentful mood,
He passed some city church, whose door at
noon wide open stood.
Mid toil and moil of daily task, 'twere here that
some were fain
To shelter from the world, and some to shelter
from the rain.

But few went out without some thought far
from life's fuss and fret,
Stirred softly by the gilded cross upon the
altar set.
Of two within the church that day, one stared
about at ease,
And one upon the chancel steps was sunk upon
his knees.

* * *

As Lucifer looked in, the sun looked out from
wintry skies
And cast a pale but piercing beam that made
him veil his eyes;
It sought the dim and dusky fane through panes
of ruby red,
And straight upon the sacred sign a mystic
radiance shed.

No sound was heard, none spake a word, but
intimately near,
From infinitely far, rang through a message,
silver-clear.
To frame its sense in human speech if I might
humbly try,
It seemed to echo back like this, man's agonising
cry:

⁂

"So long on earth as one of Mine still kneels
in faithful prayer,
So long to answer and to aid for ever I am
there;
While but a spark of true belief shall pierce
the gloom of doubt,
The eternal fires shall flame again nor ever
flicker out."

How much of this the prophet heard, how much
he knew before,
I can but guess, but saw him dart in anger from
the door.
" Without the faithful, faith were naught: I'd
better then begin,
If I can't kill it from without, to sap it from
within.

* * *

" I'll bolster up the modernists who've made the
notion rife,
That Christianity must change to suit our
modern life,
Though fools have dared to say that this
perversely is the need,
That modern life should shape itself to match
the Christian creed.

* * *

" I'll back those brainy clericals, of prejudice
bereft,
Who have whittled revelation down till nothing
much is left.

And, passing every previous bound of sceptical admission,
Proclaim a creed so very broad it lacks all definition."

* * *

By other schools within the Church, each set to scorn the other,
He hoped, with rank discordant growths, the sacred seed to smother;
By fostering egoistic cant, through ritual's slavish minions,
He sought to make a travesty of high or low opinions.

* * *

But while these schools and parties clashed, manœuvring for position,
The Church invisible lived on, inviting recognition;
In man evangelised anew he feared his only rival,
Still hoping for the best against a spiritual revival.

Great Babylon, Great Greece, Great Rome,
great powers and peoples all,
Their great days done, he knew, had crashed or
mouldered to their fall;
For all alike the lesson lurked, unlearned by
West or East,
That which the fateful fingers drew at proud
Belshazzar's feast.

* * *

Weighed in the balance one and all, and in their
hour of fate
Found wanting in the things of might that
once had made them great,
With all their fleshly fabric sound, their mental
force increased,
The starvéd soul had wilted out, the inspiration
ceased.

The vision ends, and here ends too the sour
satiric note,
The stern and bitter jest from careless laughter
most remote:
'Twas thus the dreamer strove to tell in sad and
sober sooth—
May Heaven hold it up to scorn if aught it
lacks of truth—
And since to me at least it seems most menacingly clear,
I merely say, "God save us all," and leave the
matter here.

X

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